

LOS ANGELES COUNTY VETERANS ADVISORY COMMISSION

1816 S. FIGUEROA STREET
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90015



Ruth A. Wong
Director

MINUTES REGULAR MEETING Wednesday, June 10, 2020

Present:

Absent:

Commissioners

Commissioners

Patricia Jackson-Kelley
Hector Elizalde
Thomas O'Shaughnessy
Joe Leal
Dennis Tucker
Ruel Fuentecilla
Michael McDowell
Tess Banko
Brittanie Moore

Tom Lasser

County Department

Military and Veterans Affairs

Ruth Wong, Director
Stephanie Guerrero, Secretary

Call to Order, Pledge of Allegiance and Approval of Minutes

Chair Patricia Jackson-Kelley called the meeting to order at 1:33 p.m. The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Hugh Crooks, Chair of CalVet Board.

Roll Call

There was a total of 9 Commissioners; there was a quorum. Chair Patricia Jackson-Kelley asked for a moment of silence for one minute in honor of all those who lost their lives due to violence of civil rights activity.

Approval of Minutes

Motion by Commissioner Thomas O'Shaughnessy to accept the Minutes for May 11, 2020 and seconded by Commissioner Ruel Fuentecilla. All present were in favor. Motion approved.

Chairman's Report

Chair Patricia Jackson-Kelley stated that the 2nd District participated in a food distribution on Friday, May 22 before Memorial Day. She is pleased to announce that it went very well with over 65 attendees. She thanked Commissioners Thomas O'Shaughnessy and Ruel Fuentecilla for coming out to assist with the food drive and General Ruth Wong and her staff for their unwavering support.

Chair Patricia Jackson-Kelley also attended another food drive for Congresswoman Maxine Waters. The event was held at Crozier Middle School in Los Angeles and there were over 1,000 recipients; meals were distributed through walk-up and drive-up.

LAR-CVEB Update

Commissioner Thomas O'Shaughnessy read the opening paragraph and some key points for the sake of time; The Los Angeles Region Community Veteran Engagement Board (CVEB) is an independent body working in conjunction with the Veterans Administration, led and elected by Veteran stakeholders who have been active in the Los Angeles County Veterans community for decades. The CVEB advocates for increased access to resources and improved quality of life for Los Angeles County Veterans. The CVEB focuses on key areas including: Veterans healthcare issues, benefits, Veterans and family homelessness, Veterans suicide, and service outcome examination in order to recommend systemic changes. The long-term goal on the West Los Angeles VA campus will result in the largest permanent supportive housing community for veterans and families in the nation. In short-term efforts during the COVID-19 crisis, the Greater Los Angeles VA campus has opened more than 200 beds for homeless veterans for the provision of housing and services. The CVEB Statement for West Los Angeles VA Campus and Master Plan has been submitted.

Homeless Update

Vice Chair Commissioner Hector Elizalde stated that there are still issues with homelessness throughout the city, mainly in shopping centers. Phone calls have been received from the community concerning what is being done to assist homeless veterans; the VA and Vet Hunters reported veterans are resisting and rejecting any type of assistance.

Building and Tenant Update

Commissioner Thomas O'Shaughnessy provided the following update on Bob Hope Patriotic Hall:

- The building is still closed as most County buildings during the COVID-19 outbreak. Per General Ruth Wong, we are targeting the beginning of July for a 'soft opening' of the building; staff will continue to telework. However, that will be delayed as the County is looking to the Superior Court for guidance as they are initiating their own soft opening. Mail and package pick up is still being coordinated for retrieval by the building staff for tenants.
- During the last weekend of May, the building team provided coverage as some protesters vandalized and looted some parts of Downtown Los Angeles. In wake of these events and for safety in general, we are in the process of insuring that the intrusion alarm and security surveillance systems are updated and operational. Minor graffiti was written on the front of the building and awaiting our vendor to remove.
- Through ISD, we are working towards completing the repairs on the 4th floor due to a leak.

Ad Hoc Nominations

Commissioner Thomas O'Shaughnessy provided the following report on behalf of the Ad Hoc Nomination Committee – Commissioners Thomas O'Shaughnessy, Joe Leal, Tess Banko; Commissioner Brittanie Moore was asked by the Chair to participate as a learning experience:

The Ad Hoc Nominations Committee met through Zoom where they reviewed and discussed nominations. All agreed to recommend Vice Chair Hector Elizalde take the position of Commission Chair for the 2020-2021 term of office. After much discussion, it was decided to recommend Commissioner Tess Banko to assume the position of Commission Vice Chair for the 2020-2021 term of office.

Motion by Commissioner Thomas O'Shaughnessy to elect Commissioner Hector Elizalde as the Commission Chair for the 2020-2021 term of office and seconded by Commissioner Ruel Fuentecilla. Roll call was recommended by Commissioner Thomas O'Shaughnessy; all present were in favor. Motion approved.

Motion by Commissioner Thomas O'Shaughnessy to elect Commissioner Tess Banko as the Commission Vice Chair for the 2020-2021 term of office and seconded by Commissioner Michael McDowell. Roll call was recommended by Commissioner Thomas O'Shaughnessy; all present were in favor. Motion approved.

Public Comments

Angelica Escalante, TELACU Veterans Upward Bound, stated that the program began virtual classes in Spring 2020 which were conducted through Zoom and were a success; classes offered both morning and afternoon sessions. All classes are completely free for all veterans, and reservists. Now that the program has gone virtual, it allows them to pick any student in California. The Summer 2020 session is from July 20 through August 28; information coming soon. Location is closed until further notice and staff is working remotely.

Guest Speakers

Hugh Crooks, CalVet Commission Chair, Veterans Homes stated that the Governor made a suggestion according to the budget cut to the close the Barstow Home. Barstow Home is the second oldest home in the CalVet system; it was built and opened in 1996. CalVet conducted a 10 year plan which evaluates the level of care due to the age of veterans going up and the veteran population that is going down. The lowest being provided is domiciliary care also known as independent living. As the veteran population gets older, they will need more skilled nursing and independent care. Not many veterans are willing to move to Barstow and the home has the smallest number living there. There are 400 beds total and 280 beds used at maximum. Barstow is losing veterans; 20 deaths per month. Every veteran would have to be transferred to another home and would receive the level of care needed. As the quality of care is going up, not many healthcare professionals are willing to move or work out in Barstow. According to the 10 year plan, the home was scheduled to close seven years from now; can be closed in three years per the Governor's request. The community has an opportunity to have a say so in what happens if they go and talk to the legislature and governor's office about not closing down the Barstow Home. It's possible that they can balance the budget and not close it down. There is an existing problem at Barstow Home in which the air conditioning unit is broken in three buildings and engineers have estimated that it is going to take about \$2 million to fix. The Secretary has the ability to pay for the repairs if it cost \$500,000. However, the \$2 million would require him to ask for money which wouldn't happen until the new budget in 2021. As a result, they took 40 people from Barstow and moved them into Chula Vista. It is not possible to have anyone living there. CalVet has a responsibility to repair it, unless the Governor instruct it to be closed due to the budget cut.

Nona Yegiazaryan, EDD, is the manager covering areas in Hollywood, Pasadena, and Glendale. The agency/office is providing services to job seekers by appointment only; closed to the public and some staff is teleworking. EDD is partnered with three different workers development boards; Foothill, Verdugo, and Los Angeles. All are in discussion about the soft-opening and how it will look. Please help share information to promote that EDD is hiring for the unemployment insurance. The positions EDD is looking to fill are permanent intermittent up to 1500 hours. Veterans that apply have an upper hand with employment as 10 points are added to their online test. Veteran Representatives (DVOP- Disabled Veterans Outreach Program) are working closely with clients and employers to match them with their skillset. It is recommended that veterans contact their assigned DVOP as the phone lines are busier than usual. All services remain the same, although everything is being done virtually online and by drive-thru. Virtual workshops made available are resume writing, interviewing, and job search. Job fairs are available through drive-thru or virtually.

Martha Varela, National Veterans Foundation is the new Women Veterans Outreach Coordinator. She is a fellow veteran who served about 10 years with the Minnesota Army National Guard. The National Veterans Foundation began in 1985, 24 million veterans have been served through a national toll-free helpline to connect with help and resources such as suicide crisis intervention, mental health services, homeless services, connection to the VA, legal assistance, basic needs and support for military families, survivors and dependents. The foundation is staffed by veterans. Martha is working to partner and collaborate with existing organizations and programs both locally and nationally to identify what resources are available for veterans everyday needs, such as food, shelter, and clothing. Commissioner Dennis Tucker invited Martha to the Career Advancement LA Collaborative held on the second Wednesday of each month. Martha agreed to share the information through their social media outlets.

Dr. Laura Perez, LA Southwest City College is the Dean of non-credit adult education and continuing education. She has been working to create a non-credit program to brush up on skills for veterans who would like to return to school. This program will be provided at no cost with free books and supplies. College and career success would be intended as a refresher that covers two classes in basic English in writing and basic Math to prepare them for the credit program. Another program being developed is Computer Literacy for College and Career success. This would include the following classes:

1. Introduction to Computers – learn how to email, turn on computer, and attach documents
2. Advanced Computers – learn how to use computers for college success; Microsoft
3. Life Skills – includes financial literacy on learning how to budget versus more debt

A certificate will be provided at the completion of each course. Commissioner Dennis Tucker stated that before the COVID-19 pandemic, he asked to take the lead and assist both Dr. Laura Perez and Marian Ruane who are working on the front end of this project. Moving forward, due to the COVID-19 pandemic the classes will be offered virtually.

Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Report

Ruth Wong, Director, provided the following updates:

DMVA – MVA Staff has been very busy here at the department. In comparison to the numbers from last year, the department received 3,000-4,000 phone calls a month. There has been an increase in phone calls for the department of up to 5,000 phone calls in May 2020. Staff is answering the client inquiries, making appointments, following up with their VA claim, and at the beginning stage for processing college fee waivers for students. Two staff recently retired and four staff members have been placed on assignment as Disaster Service Workers (DSW). The departments Public Information Officer was assigned as a DSW to Health Services at the Joint Information Center. There are four staff members on medical leave and one reservist deployed. We are down in our numbers of staff during the COVID-19 epidemic.

County – Los Angeles County has a severe budget deficit of \$1 billion this fiscal year and looking at a \$1 billion deficit next fiscal year. We are looking at how we are going to close that gap. The department is looking at how we are going to close a 6-10 percent budget gap with a curtailment. In terms of dollar amount curtailment reductions; 6.1 percent - \$343,000, an 8 percent - \$452,000, and a 10 percent - \$565,000. The CEO is in negotiations with a number of the labor unions depending on the concessions of what number to present to the Board of Supervisors in two weeks. With the 8 percent budget cut, MVA is looking at a reduction in two staff, security services, services and supplies.

COVID-19 – Conducting daily briefings and forwarding information to the Center of Operations letting them know the statistics of teleworking and DSW's. We have participated in a number of surveys and been a part of the Reconstitution/Reopening phase. A committee has been established and led by Chief Deputy Stephanie Stone; along with Jorge Reynoso, JeNai Davis, Chris Duarte, and Commissioner Thomas O'Shaughnessy. More to come on the reopening which is at the discretion of each department on whether we are ready and able to safely open our facility to both staff and clients. Looking forward to possibly still having staff telecommute.

CACVSO funding – supported by Senator Archuleta championing a request of \$5.4 million budget ask process. Information has been sent forward but have not heard back. The funds would help with additional staffing across the state; an additional 6-7 staff in terms of our department.

Memorial Day event – virtual event at L.A. National Cemetery was hosted by KABC David Ono; televised on Memorial Day at 10 a.m.

Virtual event – MVA is assisting Montgomery Hom in planning a virtual event for the Chinese American veterans of WWII who served during the European and Pacific theatre of operations honored with the Congressional Gold Medal. The event will be held on September 2, 2020. KABC has accepted to participate and host the event. Invites will be sent out to the Chief of Staff to various service branches asking to do a 30 second pre-recorded congratulation and announcement that will be incorporated into the event.

Operation Welcome Home – a special mailing project to our newly separated service members to welcome them back to Los Angeles County and let them know about the services and benefits that they've earned. One mailing has been sent out thus far of more than 300 letters.

Agenda Items that are Deferred to Next Month's Meeting

- Unemployment part of EDD to brief about processing claims
- Invite USO President and Chinese American Community
- Public Counsel to brief about upcoming eviction
- Evaluate Strategic Plan 2020-2021 in response to minority veterans
- Founder of Save a Warrior program

Motion by Commissioner Dennis Tucker to recommend a subcommittee for minority veterans be established for the 2020-2021 term of office and seconded by Commissioner Thomas O'Shaughnessy; all present were in favor. Motion approved.

Follow-Up on Veteran Issues

None.

Good of the Order

Vice Chair Hector Elizalde stated that he participated in Honor Guard at Azusa City Hall on Memorial Day. A year ago, the VA opened up a temporary clinic in Arcadia that serves veterans in the San Fernando Valley; permanent location is still under consideration and projected to be a 4 year process. The work that the VSO's do for veterans is sometimes taken for granted but glad that MVA has the right people doing the work. He is very pleased and salutes Commissioner Joe Leal for the incredible work the Vet Hunters do to help veterans. Commissioner Leal was considered for a role on the commission.

Commissioner Thomas O'Shaughnessy stated that during the Ad Hoc Nomination discussion of the Vice Chair for 2020-2021 term of office, Commissioner Joe Leal was under consideration and could not accept at this time.

Commissioner Joe Leal stated that he declined the nomination for Vice Chair due to the high demands of the work he does for Vet Hunters. His time is very limited as he works out in the field and is contacted by many agencies throughout each day. Veterans are disconnected from resources; evictions are a primary reason. He thanked Commissioners and MVA staff for all their hard work.

Commissioner Tess Banko stated that the current COVID-19 pandemic puts veterans at high risk triggering trauma, battling an unseen enemy, being isolated; there is a need for suicide prevention. Behavior Health can become a serious issue once unemployment runs out due to job loss and economic issues that are leading to housing losses. Public Counsel mentioned that after June 30, we will begin to see 3-day notices, unlawful detainer, and evictions. In response, the Los Angeles Housing Services Authority (LAHSA) noted that SSVF restrictions have been eased allowing more people to get preventative SSVF to avoid homelessness. Public Counsel put out preventative resources for any veteran that receives an eviction notice. She is an advocate for the new 18-unit housing project in Hawthorne for veterans and families. She asked the commission to help her advocate for the 40-50 units that can accommodate the land.

Commissioner Dennis Tucker was pleased to announce that Herb Wesson, LA City Council said a few words on the Black Lives Matter movement at the LA Collaborative. He has partnered with the LA Sparks to record a message for the enlistees for the U.S. Army for 2020-2021 since the large banquet has become virtual. A Food Drive on May 29 was held for National Guard and Army Reserve recipients. The 2nd District held a Food Drive on May 15 where over 2,500 families were fed. He proposed a collaborative food drive for the commission in which Commissioner Thomas O'Shaughnessy raised a concern about the reopening of county buildings during phase 1 and 2. Director Ruth Wong and Commissioner Elizalde agreed with Commissioner O'Shaughnessy and suggested to look later this summer in August.

Commissioner Brittanie Moore stated that she and Commissioner Joe Leal attended a Red Cross blood drive in memory of the fallen military personnel for Memorial Day. Supervisor Hilda Solis, 1st District, gave some remarks. Both Commissioner Moore and Commissioner Leal gave remarks as well and donated blood.

A total of 19 participants at the virtual meeting. Meeting adjourned at 3:40 p.m.

Stephanie Guerrero
Secretary
June 10, 2020